

CONFIDENTIAL

OCI No. 1755/65

15 May 1965

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Comments on "A Citizen's White Paper on American Policy in Vietnam and Southeast Asia" by Marcus G. Raskin

1. Mr. Raskin's "White Paper" is a critical review of the US position and policies in South Vietnam (past and present) capped by certain recommendations for new policies and a hypothetical projection of the course events in Southeast Asia might take if those recommendations were followed. Mr. Raskin's argument, however, is grounded in an historical analysis that is at best distorted, is generally inaccurate, and often flies directly in the face of simple fact. His theses are argued with considerably more passion than precision, his diction is often as faulty as his logic, and his recommendations--where they are not patently absurd--appear to relate to a world quite different from that in which we actually live. Throughout his paper, Mr. Raskin seems to accept Communist claims or public statements of intent at face value, gives uniform credence to the Communist version of disputed events, and systematically denigrates or distorts the motives of the US government, its officers (at all levels) who have been concerned with the problems of Vietnam, and the South Vietnamese with whom the US has been allied and whose struggle for independence the US has endeavored to support.

2. The errors, inaccuracies and direct perversions of the truth in Mr. Raskin's paper are so numerous that a discursive recital and critique would require a monograph at least as long as his original text. (Detailed comments on his grosser errors of fact are given in this memorandum's appendix.) Mr. Raskin first sets the stage for his discourse by a brief review of the immediate post-World War II background of US involvement in Indochina--a review whose tone is epitomized by his characterization of the Schuman Plan as "an attempt to fashion a coal and steel cartel" and whose level of factual accuracy, by his complete inversion of the actual temporal sequence of the convening of the 1954 Geneva Conference, Pierre Mendes-France's accession to power, and the French National Assembly vote against the EDC.

CONFIDENTIAL

3. Having rewritten the history of 1945-54 to suit his convenience, Mr. Raskin then proceeds to re-write the history of Vietnam during the 1954-1960 period in which the current Communist insurgency in South Vietnam began. After placing the entire responsibility for the insurgency on Diem (which is inaccurate) and contending that the North Vietnamese took no hand in Southern troubles until after 1960 (which is untrue), Mr. Raskin embarks on an analysis of the period from 1960 until the present day--an analysis Hanoi would probably be delighted to publish in its own journals as an example of "advanced" American thought but one which bears virtually no relation to the actual course of events and which, in the bargain, systematically portrays US officials in Vietnam as fools and their Vietnamese associates as knaves. Then comes a short discourse on the genesis of current US military policy, a discourse whose logic and grammar are hard to follow but seem intended to imply that the US military establishment consists of brutes insensitive to human life and probably prone to sinister domestic political designs.

4. Turning from his demonstrably inaccurate account of the past and patently distorted view of the present, Mr. Raskin looks to the future and, after a short aside on the iniquities of current US barbarism (torture and napalming of innocents), offers a set of policy proposals which are not only naive but betray an ignorance or at least total disregard of the actual course of recent history. (For example, Mr. Raskin advocates an International Control Commission mechanism which, he contends, "has worked well" in the "Palestine-Israeli situation"; but he quite ignores the fact that his system has already been tried in Laos and South Vietnam with a notable lack of success.) His recommendations tabled, Mr. Raskin concludes with a few predictions and projections which bear little, if any, relation to the situation in Asia as it actually now exists or, indeed, to the political world in which we actually live.

5. The history of Indochina in the two decades since the end of World War II is an incredibly complex subject on many aspects of which the truth is imperfectly known and, perhaps, largely dependent on one's angle of vision. It is a period concerning whose events--in their very sequence or occurrence, let alone their genesis or significance--honest students will inevitably differ and too confident opinions are the mark of ignorance or disingenuous special

CONFIDENTIAL

pleading. Similarly, the infinitely complicated problems of present-day Vietnam involve topics over which honorable men can and obviously do disagree. Our objections to Mr. Raskin's paper derive not from the fact that it is critical of past US actions or from its advocacy of policies different from those on which the US Government is presently acting, but from its uniformly tendentious approach, its systematic denigration of US motives, and its studied disregard of those areas of historical fact which are not subject to intellectually honest dispute. Serious analyses of the current situation in Indochina merit careful consideration whether or not they are critical of the past or present US role therein, but we believe Mr. Raskin's paper forfeits all claims to consideration as a serious study.

CONFIDENTIAL

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

A P P E N D I X

Detailed Comments on "A Citizen's White Paper on
American Policy in Vietnam and Southeast Asia" by
Marcus G. Raskin

In the interests of space, the following comments
are keyed to footnotes which have been marked on the at-
tached copy of Mr. Raskin's text:

SECTION I.

1. Part of our present problems did indeed derive
from misconceptions during World War II about Indochina
and the "Indochinese" (no such people exist), but there
is no resemblance between what President Roosevelt had
in mind and what would now be termed a "neutralized area."

2. In March 1945, the French wanted Indochina back
period, and wanted to take up as if nothing had happened
in Indochina during the interval between 1940 and 1945.
This was the root of most of France's subsequent political
troubles in the area.

3. This paragraph is a grossly oversimplified and
distorted summary of a critical and delicate period in
US-French relations.

4. Quite the reverse, Ho was willing for a time to
dicker politically with the French because his own position
was weak and because he then thought the Communists would
take power in France.

5. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The
French Communist Party consistently opposed and systemati-
cally sabotaged the prosecution of the war in Indochina.

6. This, again, is simply not true.

7. This is the first time we have ever seen the
Schuman Plan described in a non-Communist publication as
a sinister cartel intended to place Western Europe in
economic fiefdom to the United States.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

CONFIDENTIAL

8. The sentence to which this note is appended suggests a causal connection between the Schuman Plan and US support of French activity in Vietnam which simply did not exist. The following sentences are tendentious and mendacious.

9. The United States dealt openly in Vietnam, in support of an ally, but certainly not directly; aid to Vietnam was funnelled through the French and its actual employment controlled by the French. The US did not assume a direct role until 1954.

10. Another distortion; the problem was not French inability to organize indigenous political groups but French intransigence on even discussing the possibility of eventual independence.

11. Another garbled and inaccurate summary of a complex set of events. The French, incidentally, did not lose their military position after Dien Bien Phu; they lost their political will to carry on.

12. We see nothing sinister in the fact that these officers of government, charged with official responsibility for or seized of legitimate official interest in Far Eastern affairs, were uniformly opposed to a course of action they considered adverse to US interests. The remainder of this paragraph sets forth yet another distorted and oversimplified summary of a complex sequence of events.

13. This sentence and the paragraph which follows propounds a thesis based on a complete inversion of the actual sequence of events. The Russians did not pressure the Viet Minh into a conference "in exchange" for a French vote against the EDC. The Geneva Conference was already in session when Mendes-France became Premier and the Assembly vote came after the conference, not before. Mendes-France knew that the Viet Minh were already prepared to give serious consideration to partition when he became Premier; on the strength of this knowledge he made his grandstand play of promising to resign if he could not effect a settlement of the war within ten days. The Russians did take advantage of Mendes-France's position by offering to put pressure on the Viet Minh in return for a scuttling of EDC, but it was Mendes France who was outmaneuvered; for he accepted partition at the 17th parallel although there are excellent grounds for thinking that the Viet Minh would have been willing to settle for the 18th. In any event, Mr. Raskin's version of these events is simply wrong on factual grounds.

CONFIDENTIAL

13. Article 19 of the 20 July 1954 "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam" (to which a distorted reference is here made) also says that the zones assigned to the respective forces (i.e., North and South Vietnam) "are not to be used for the resumption of hostilities or to further an aggressive policy," a provision which North Vietnam has systematically and flagrantly violated and on which it was specifically charged with violation by the Canadian and Indian members of the ICC in 1962. Mr. Raskin also ignores Articles 17 and 18, which North Vietnam has also consistently and systematically violated.

SECTION II.

1. You cannot "view" anything "rhetorically" nor can you simultaneously "liberate and contain" an enemy. More to the point, Mr. Raskin is giving a highly colored description of the US view in 1954 that Communist nations were embarked on a policy of expansion which constituted a serious threat to the vital interests of the US and its allies, for whose defense the US had assumed formal responsibility by treaty obligations.

2. Another set of distortions. Dulles, in fact, simply felt that the line now had to be drawn in Indochina as it had been drawn in Korea.

3. Every sentence in this paragraph is replete with factual errors. Bao Dai never backed Diem against General Hinh or the sects (he did exactly the reverse). The Binh Xuyen's control was confined to Saigon-Cholon and did not extend "throughout South Vietnam"; Gen. Hinh was not the original "first choice" but an alternative that Bao Dai and the French came to consider better than Diem for their purposes.

4. He not only seemed to be; he was.

5. Gen. Hinh never had much Vietnamese support and, again, the Binh Xuyen's power never extended much beyond Saigon.

6. This sentence is one of Mr. Raskin's two sops to "objectivity."

7. The actual number was around 900,000; Mr. Raskin neglects to mention that, by contrast, the number leaving South Vietnam for the North was infinitesimal.

CONFIDENTIAL

8. These were operative reasons, but the main reason, which Mr. Raskin neglects to mention, was fully justified fear of Communist brutality and oppression.

9. Technically accurate, but nonetheless a distortion. Diem had no real power base other than a small group of Central Vietnamese Catholics and did welcome the support of the northern Catholic refugees. The religious issue as such, however, did not then exist, nor did it arise for several years.

10. The election was quite genuine (hence the quotes are tendentious) and though it was certainly not free in the Western sense, few observers at the time questioned the fact that Diem was overwhelmingly preferred by the South Vietnamese people to Bao Dai.

11. These fears were well founded and were based on North Vietnam's overwhelming numerical superiority (a result of Mendes-France's accepting partition at the 17th parallel) and realistic knowledge of how elections are run in areas under Communist control.

12. The Hanoi government never did any such thing. It did initially concentrate on consolidating its control over the North, but the reason was that it expected the Diem regime to collapse and anticipated acquiring control over all of Vietnam through the scheduled 1956 elections. As soon as it became apparent that Diem had a chance of surviving and that the elections were not going to be held, Hanoi issued orders to the cadre it had left behind in the South (in violation of the Geneva Accords) to begin terrorist and insurgent activities.

13. Diem's errors and mistakes certainly contributed to South Vietnam's problems, but what turned "the wheel of fortune" was Hanoi's calculated decision to begin an insurgence campaign in order to effect the downfall of the Saigon government when it became apparent that this government had a chance to survive.

14. A tendentious account indeed of Diem's move to break the Chinese stranglehold on economic life and to force the Chinese community to accept the responsibilities of citizenship. The moves were tactically bungled on occasion but strategically sound and politically essential. The disruption of the economy was a very short-lived temporary phenomenon.

CONFIDENTIAL

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

15. This whole paragraph is tendentious, the Viet Cong (no longer Viet Minh) were a threat to internal security, but Diem needed no urging on this score; indeed he was more aware of the implications of the rising insurgent menace than were some Americans. Devilliers (from whom Mr. Raskin seems to have borrowed heavily) hardly classes as an objective or unbiased source.

16. This change in emphasis was necessitated by the rising pace of Communist-directed insurgency.

17. This assignment of the adjective "treacherous" to a North Vietnamese operation is the other of Mr. Raskin's two sops to objectivity.

18. Mr. Raskin uncritically accepts the Communist propaganda version of a very minor incident of alleged food poisoning in a South Vietnamese prison in December 1958. No prisoners died and there were strong grounds at the time for thinking that the incident, picked up and replayed with suspicious alacrity by a variety of Vietnamese Communist propaganda organs, had been planned from the outset as a stage maneuver. Armed bands of Communist-controlled rebels were active in the south at least two years before this "incident" occurred.

SECTION III.

1. That is to say, Communist nations prefer to wage aggression by subversion and terrorism rather than the more risky methods of frontal military assault.

2. Absolute nonsense and a complete perversion of the truth. The activity of the Communist rebels in the South was initiated in response to Hanoi's orders and by 1960 Hanoi was supporting and directing a growing civil war. The remainder of the paragraph continues in a similar distorted vein.

3. The National Liberation Front was created, by Hanoi, in the fall of 1960 because the war had reached the stage where the Communists felt the need of a political "front" mechanism. The remainder of the paragraph is inaccurate and disingenuous.

4. The recommendations made were dictated by the objective realities of the then current situation, not by the OSS background of Mr. Rostow or Mr. Hilsman.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

5. There was, admittedly, considerable peasant apathy towards Saigon, but hardly total alienation.

6. Distorted and untrue. In 1962 US pilots were doing very little flying (except on training missions) and though South Vietnamese pilots could have been more discriminating in their target selection, the picture was nowhere near so stark as Mr. Raskin paints it.

7. Both, unfortunately, did occur; but it is false to say they were commonplace. The following sentence is simply not true.

8. This whole paragraph is overdone and distorted, and the one which follows merits even harsher criticism.

9. Another gross overstatement of an admittedly existent problem. No troops in combat are excessively gentle towards the source of hostile fire.

10. This statement is simply not true, nor are the two sentences which follow.

11. A prime example of Mr. Raskin's technique of elliptical telescoping and distortion. The US was responding to an unprovoked attack on the high seas (which Mr. Raskin neglects to mention) and our Tonkin Gulf actions had a number of favorable results as well as stimulating the Communists to their own retaliation.

12. Gross exaggeration.

13. The account of this period--during which Khanh, as a de facto as well as de jure head of the military establishment, was very much in power--is quite distorted.

14. The contention that the US had "lost" the war and the analysis which precedes it will simply not stand up under scrutiny.

15. This is simply not true.

16. Nor is this.

17. Few believed the supply routes would dry up; many (with reason) felt the bombing had military value. Obviously the bulk of the evidence and comments involved were contained in highly classified material to which Mr. Raskin would not have access. From his former service on the White House staff, Mr. Raskin should have realized this.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

CONFIDENTIAL

18. A distorted overstatement of a very complex matter.

19. An admitted joke suddenly becomes the whole truth.

20. The figure never was this high, and this is certainly not the situation today. Instead, there are signs that the bulk of the Viet Cong regular units are converting to a 7.62 mm family of weapons all of which (and the ammunition they use) must be supplied from external sources.

21. As in Burma, perhaps, where insurgency is chronic and endemic?

22. Quang Lien's fuzzy-minded peace movement, which was directed against all foreign troops including those sent from North Vietnam, was explicitly disavowed, and quashed, by the Buddhist leadership.

23. The gas employed (in very limited areas) was not lethal. Pilots are never allowed to "pick their own targets" in the sense that Mr. Raskin is implying. (They may under certain conditions, as when patrolling a designated stretch of road, be permitted to select targets of opportunity from within precisely defined categories, but that is something quite different from the notion Mr. Raskin seems to be conveying.)

24. Mr. Raskin depicts the administrative structure of the US Government as some kind of sinister cabal.

25. Their verbal response would hardly be described as mild. Their physical response has obviously been limited by their own weaknesses in areas where they are faced with overwhelming US strength.

26. Is Mr. Raskin suggesting that the US should let other nations, particularly its avowed enemies, select its means or define its ends?

27. The US bombings were prompted by wanton attacks on US personnel, timing was dictated by the Communists who launched the attacks at times and places of their, not our, choosing. So far as we (though perhaps not the North Vietnamese) were concerned, the presence of Kosygin was accidental and irrelevant.

CONFIDENTIAL

28. This is simply not true: if anything, the area of GVN control in the region around Saigon has been expanding in recent months (not contracting), American quarters have never been bombed regularly, parts of the Embassy were severely damaged but the Embassy itself was certainly not destroyed (indeed, its continuous use was never suspended), the Viet Cong control no towns. Mr. Raskin simply has no respect for facts or apparent interest in them.

29. This is also just plain false. US Marines are in the Da Nang area and at Phu Bai, both regions under GVN control when the Marines arrived (though admittedly the Marines were landed to ensure the continuation of that control). It is perversity to claim that the Marines remain in Da Nang on VC sufferance, for this is simply not true.

30. A gross distortion. Some officials may have questioned the competence or skill of individual ARVN units, but no responsible US official has ever made statements such as these either in public or in privileged official communications.

31. And apparently Mr. Raskin is prepared to accept Communist claims or boasts uncritically at face value.

32. The retired officers of the Titanic would hardly be the most qualified commentators on matters of nautical safety.

33. This sentence would make more sense if one substituted "not possibly" for "only." The type of conference De Gaulle was advocating would almost invariably result in Communist control over all of Vietnam.

34. If De Gaulle ever made the unqualified assertion that the Chinese and North Vietnamese wanted to negotiate (which we doubt) he was wrong. Hanoi has evinced cold disinterest in any form of negotiations except under conditions involving US surrender. Peiping has been adamantly and vituperatively opposed to negotiations and to any who advocate them at the present time.

35. Malaysia, a political idea vindicated by a UN-supervised popular referendum, cannot be described with any pretense to objectivity or accuracy as a "British creation," though Sukarno, of course, consistently uses such formulations to justify his policy of aggression.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

36. This whole paragraph is a tissue of misrepresentations, untruths, and distortions.

37. This seems regrettably true. It is certainly not understood by Mr. Raskin.

38. Given the highly vocal activities of a number of Congressmen--including Senators Morse, Church, Fulbright and others--Congress could hardly be described as silent. From the standpoint of accuracy, this statement is about on a par with many of Mr. Raskin's other contentions.

39. We see nothing sinister in the President's listening to and occasionally acting upon the foreign policy information and advice provided by those agencies of government tasked by lawful statute with providing such services.

40. This is not only the "official position," but it also happens to be the truth. And it is not open to serious question by anyone who is well informed or willing to face facts as they exist.

41. We do not regard Mr. Matsumoto as a particularly competent or qualified observer and disagree with his findings. If he believes that the US Mission in Saigon thinks that only 30% of the VC are Communists, then he is gravely misinformed.

42. 1 is correct, 2 is wrong, 3 is foolishness, and 4, as written, makes no sense at all.

43. The insistence referred to is based on a realistic appraisal of who controls the Viet Cong and an unwillingness to be duped into accepting the Communist front tactic on its own pretensions.

44. Mr. Raskin is apparently ignorant of Hanoi's oft reiterated and quite unequivocal position on reunification and the echoes of this position voiced by Hanoi's wholly-controlled puppet, the NLF.

45. However, we are determined to ensure that this activity is not bossed from Hanoi or Peiping.

46. Nonsense. Hanoi has never indicated the slightest willingness to consider a neutralization of North Vietnam and, in fact, has repeatedly and adamantly insisted that this point is not negotiable.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

47. Apparently Mr. Raskin and the unnamed diplomats he refers to do not see a continuation of Hanoi-directed insurgency in the South as any inhibition to meaningful negotiations.

48. Except for such trivial matters as collapsing the morale of our South Vietnamese allies, confirming the Chinese thesis about the non-Communist world's inability to cope with aggression by subversion (i.e., "wars of national liberation"), vindication of the "paper tiger" image of the US so loudly trumpeted from Peiping and Hanoi, a strengthening of the Chinese hand in the Sino-Soviet dispute, an encouragement to the incitement of similar insurgencies in Thailand and elsewhere, and a serious re-appraisal by all our Asian allies of US constancy and ability to defend them from subversive assault. Aside from such considerations as these, of course, the cost would be trivial.

SECTIONS IV, V, and VI, we believe do not require comment; for there is little we could add that will not be readily apparent to any objective reader.

CONFIDENTIAL